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Amanda Viana

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Amanda completed this piece as a final paper for the Rise of the American Novel seminar her senior year for Dr. Ann Brunjes. She is currently finishing an Honors Thesis.

Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, published in 1827 but set in seventeenth-century Puritan New England, explores the complex themes of authority and independence in the American colonies in order to gain perspective on post-colonial controversies. In the novel Sedgwick's main character, Hope Leslie, is orphaned and sent from Britain to live with relatives in the American colonies. Living among the Puritans in a settlement near Boston, Hope often clashes with authority. When the settlement comes into conflict with nearby tribes of Native Americans Hope's sister is kidnapped and other relatives are killed. Despite these circumstances Hope often defends and even plots to protect several Native American characters throughout the novel. Her strong will and disobedient actions often get Hope into trouble with Puritan authorities; however she follows her own ethical code until the very end of the novel, when, as an adult, she must once again face her sister and her kidnappers.

Hope Leslie, is a young woman of a unique and independent spirit, in fact "nothing could be more unlike the authentic, 'thoroughly educated' and thoroughly disciplined young ladies of the present day, than Hope Leslie…sportive, free, and beautiful" (Sedgwick 121). Hope's best friend Esther Downing, on the other hand, is "restrained within prescribed and formal limits, and devoted to utility" (Sedgwick 121). Hope tells Esther that she is "as wise as Solomon, and always in the right" (Sedgwick 130); however Hope often disregards Esther's advice (and the directives of her superiors) in favor of her own moral judgment. Sedgwick contrasts the independence of Hope Leslie and the obedience of Esther Downing as a means to illustrate the conflict between the new American ideal of self-governance and the patriarchal expectations of obedience, and to emphasize independent moral judgment or "reliance on conscience as a legitimation of political action" (Garvey), particularly for women in post-colonial America. Further complicating the novel's argument is the presence of Magawisca, a Native American girl who is sent away from her family to serve the Fletcher family. Magawisca is complicated because she neither disregards authority and tradition for her own judgment like Hope, nor does she blindly obey authority like Esther. Instead she provides a kind of balance between authority and self-governance. Twice Magawisca disobeys authority—both times to her own peril. However she still expresses a deep respect and obedience in her everyday life, even when her conscience feels torn between two forces.

Seventeenth-century Puritans left Great Britain in order to pursue self-governance and independence. Once they arrived in the American colonies, they established a patriarchal rule and expected obedience. Even 50 years after the American Revolution, during the Jacksonian period of democracy, Americans were still struggling with new concepts of democracy. How would the government of a new nation impose law and order without compromising the ideals of independence and self-governance that the country was founded on, especially considering that the nation's birth took place as a result of revolution? The American Revolution, according to the laws of Great Britain, was illegal, treasonous and, many Loyalists would argue, immoral. *Hope Leslie* "[raises] questions about the legitimate resistance to authority" (Strand), and ultimately accepts individual political action as justifiable as long as it is based in a moral justification.
Changing social debate during Sedgwick's lifetime under the influence of "urbanization, industrialization, and democratization" led to the "barriers preventing women from circumventing traditional norms…being vigorously debated" (Garvey). Not only was the role of the individual American male's participation in the political and legal arenas still on shaky ground, the controversial roles of American women in the public realm were being debated in Jacksonian America. Sedgwick's contemporaries were "[beginning] to exercise the political voice foundational to claiming democratic citizenship" (Strand). In fact, as Amy Dunham Strand explains in "Interpositions: *Hope Leslie*, Women's Petitions, and Historical Fiction in Jacksonian America", in the 1830's, less than a decade after the novel was published, women began to write petitions to Congress on behalf of Native Americans. Strand comments:

> While there is no direct historical link between Hope Leslie and women's actual petitions, they share remarkable rhetorical similarities. Both fundamentally announced themselves as interpositions on behalf of others' natural rights, initially made use of a supplicating stance and humble tone, and ultimately challenged patriarchal structures through their articulation of political opinion, moving women an important step toward citizenship. (Strand)

Although Sedgwick herself felt uncomfortable in the public eye, her contemporaries were beginning to insert themselves into the public sphere, albeit for the sake of others. Although their methods are more similar to Magawisca's balance of resistance within the structures of society rather than Hope's outright defiance, the petitions are in direct opposition to the kind of obedience that Esther represents in the novel.

The novel begins with the story of William Fletcher, who begins his life in England and is led, by his religious beliefs, to the American colonies. Unfortunately he must leave without the love of his youth: his cousin, Alice. Fletcher's uncle disapproves of his nephew's politics, and his self-governance:

> The pliant courtier was struck with the lofty independence of the youth who, from the first, shewed that neither frowns nor favor would induce him to bow the knee to the idols Sir William had served. There was something in this independence that awed the inferior mind of the uncle. (Sedgwick 9)

Fletcher's conflicts with authority and his independent sense of morality foreshadow Hope's independent spirit and actions later in the novel. Although he is Hope's legal and moral guardian, he has trouble disciplining her when she goes against the community's leaders. He often seems to be caught between his respect for authority and his understanding of Hope's reliance on her own moral judgment to guide her actions. Though he sometimes seems to want to see events in terms of black and white, he has trouble disciplining Hope for her self-governance. At one point in the novel he admits to Hope, "I have proved myself not fit to teach, or to guide thee" (Sedgwick 114).

Hope Leslie, Sedgwick's title character, is the elder daughter and the spitting image of Alice, and when her parents die she and her sister are sent to live with Fletcher. Because of Fletcher's love for her, and because his "denying virtues were all self-denying" (Sedgwick 122) he fails to discipline Hope in a manner acceptable to the Puritans, particularly Governor Winthrop. While Fletcher has no trouble governing himself in a respectable manner and obeying the rules of morality and decorum set forth by the community's religious leaders, he finds it nearly impossible to hold Hope to the same strict standards. He seems to respect her mind and reasoning and therefore has intense trouble instructing her to obey her superiors rather than her own conscience. Sedgwick emphasizes Hope's differences from her Puritan friends and neighbors. She is "[endowed] with the beauty with which poetry has invested Hebe" (Sedgwick 122). She is also indulged—first by her mother, then her mother's cousin and her guardian Mr. Fletcher, and by her aunt Grafton especially. Aunt Grafton guides Hope's rebellious attitude toward the Puritans. Hope's parents were members of the established church, and Aunt Grafton's criticism of some of the Puritan's ways led Hope to "doubt their infallibility" (Sedgwick 123).

Hope Leslie is not content to blindly obey authority because she has her own moral compass and she is the very picture of independence and self-governance. The patriarchal authority of the Puritans does not approve, and sometimes even her friends do not understand Hope's actions. Everell laments, "Fortune, and beauty, and indulgence, had had their usual and fatal effect on Hope Leslie" (Sedgwick 207). He is disappointed by her secrecy and what he sees as her lack of consideration for those who care for her: "'How changed,' thought Everell, as his eye glanced toward her, 'thus selfishly and impatiently to pursue her own pleasure

without the slightest notice of her friend's disappointment'" (Sedgwick 209). Everell misinterprets Hope's actions on behalf of an inferior who she feels has been wronged as selfishness and concern with her own pleasure and whim. After Hope releases a Native American herbalist, Nelema, from a Puritan jail (she has falsely been accused of witchcraft after healing Hope's tutor from a snakebite), Fletcher tells Hope, "I have proved myself not fit to teach, or to guide thee" (Sedgwick 114). Therefore Hope must travel to Boston to be supervised by Governor Winthrop's family, and influenced by Winthrop's wife and her niece, Esther Downing. In response to this sentence Hope writes to her cousin Everell, "The idea of this puritanical guardianship did not strike me agreeably" (Sedgwick 114). Hope has become used to the somewhat flexible guidance of her uncle and cannot bear the idea of having to submit to such strict authoritarianism as Governor Winthrop is sure to provide.

Esther Downing could not be more different from Hope Leslie. "They were unlike in every thing that distinguished each….but, however variant their dispositions, they melted into each other, like light and shade, each enhancing the beauty and effect of the other" (Sedgwick 139). Esther is "raised in the strictest school of the Puritans" (Sedgwick 135) and cannot bring herself to disobey. "She attained the age of nineteen, without one truant wish straying beyond the narrow bound of domestic duty and religious exercises" (Sedgwick 136). It is not in her nature to object to or disregard the rules set for her. Unlike Hope, who sees all situations in shades of gray, and considers it her duty to judge right from wrong, Esther sees things in black and white. She believes that right and wrong have already been determined by the authorities of the community. She does not view it as her place to interpret legal or moral authority, but simply to obey.
Although Fletcher's son Everell and Hope both have affection and respect for Esther, they often get fed up with her dogmatic obedience. When Everell asks Esther to help him free his Native American friend Magawisca from prison, she refuses. Everell is tired of Esther's strict submission to authority and says to her, "'But surely, Esther, there must be warrant, as you call it, for sometimes resisting legitimate authority, or all our friends in England would not be at open war with their king.'" Esther disagrees, and asserts that these "friends" are men of Puritan authority and are therefore guided by the Lord and his scripture (Sedgwick 278). Hope also becomes disenchanted with her obedience, often begging Esther to stop censuring Hope's actions. At one point she calls Esther a "born preacher" and remarks, "'Now, Esther, don't look at me so, as if I was little better than one of the wicked'" (Sedgwick 180).

Magawisca complicates Sedgwick's dichotomy between Hope and Esther. Magawisca is the daughter of Chief Mononotto, and therefore Pequod royalty, who witnesses the massacre of her family by English settlers. She is captured and sent by Governor Winthrop to serve in the Fletcher household, along with her brother. Magawisca submits to authority and even becomes familiar and friendly with the family; in fact, Everell becomes her best friend and Sedgwick includes a subtext of both sibling and romantic love in their relationship. However when Magawisca's father comes to save his children and executes most of the Fletcher family, Magawisca follows her father, much to the confusion and even consternation of the white settlers who have encompassed her into their lives. Although Magawisca respects her father's judgment and authority she protests when he wants to kill the innocent Fletcher family:

> Magawisca uttered a cry of agony, and springing forward with her arms uplifted, as if deprecating his approach, she sunk down at her father's feet, and clasping her hands, "save them—save them," she cried, "the mother—the children—oh they are all good—take vengeance on your enemies—but spare—spare our friends—our benefactors—I bleed when they are struck—oh command them to stop!" she screamed, looking to the companions of her father, who unchecked by her cries, went pressing on to their deadly work. (Sedgwick 62)

Magawisca's pleas fall on deaf ears. However when her father kidnaps Everell and attempts to behead him, Magawisca cannot stand by. She physically interposes herself in between her father and Everell, and loses her arm in the process. Magawisca is willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of another. Unlike Hope, who uses coquetry and cunning to achieve her ends, Magawisca is willing to sacrifice her freedom, standing in the community, and even her life in order to save her friend.

It seems that Magawisca's view of her own authority figures is more respectful than Hope's because she feels that the Native American's authority is based on morality. Speaking of the beheading of her brother by the Puritans, she says to Everell, "You English tell us, Everell, that the book of your law is better than that written on our hearts, for ye say it teaches mercy, compassion, forgiveness—if ye had such a law and believed it, would ye thus have treated a captive boy?" (Sedgwick 51). Magawisca and Hope challenge and ultimately reject the authority of the Puritans because they feel that it leaves no room for independent moral judgment. The codified laws of the Puritans cannot match the law written on the hearts of the Pequod tribe because it does not leave room for the individuals to show mercy, compassion, or forgiveness. This is also expressed in a different way through Esther, who although she seems to feel a tug of empathy for Magawisca, refuses to help Everell free her because it goes against the codified authority.

However it is important to note that even the Pequod code of law and moral judgment dismisses female points of view—unless those females are thinking in "masculine" ways. When Magawisca's mother tells the warriors to avenge the deaths of their people, Mononotto says, "when women put down their womanish thoughts and counsel like men, they should be obeyed" (Sedgwick 52). Although Mononotto seems to respect his wife and later his daughter, it is only because he feels they are behaving in masculine ways. When Magawisca's later actions—her petitioning to her father to spare the Fletcher family and her interception in behalf of Everell—go beyond this interpretation of reasoning free of "womanish thoughts" she is largely ignored. Hope and Magawisca's disobedience to authority is acted out in a feminine way. Both girls petition the authority in order to help the innocent, much like Sedgwick's contemporaries writing petitions to Congress in the 1830's; a strictly feminine method of protest. These women "departed from previous efforts by abandoning male intermediaries" (Strand).

Magawisca's role in the novel is complicated not only by her gender, but also by her race. Although she, like Hope, follows her own conscience against the Puritan authorities she is not treated in the same manner that Hope is. Although Hope frees two prisoners during the course of novel, as well as other smaller acts of disobedience, she is never put on trial or even harshly punished for her actions. Furthermore the Puritans refuse to acknowledge that Magawisca answers to an authority other than their own. They judge her based on their own system of laws, values and morals. Magawisca is separated from this code of ethics twice over. Not only is her position as a Native American separate her from this society that has so intrusively begun to take over her own, she is also a woman. In Jacksonian American women were just beginning to be considered in the lawmaking process, and their personal involvement in matters of government and law was even scarcer.

The Puritans of Boston find Magawisca's attitude a personal affront to their way of life. During her trial a man comments to Everell, "See, with what an air she comes among her betters as if she were a queen of us all" (Sedgwick 282). If her gender makes her less capable of discerning right from wrong, in the minds of the Puritans her status as a racial other makes it next to impossible. By the time Sedgwick was writing *Hope Leslie,* Americans had given up on trying to convert Native Americans to their way of life and were now focused on "removing" them. Puritans may have seen the potential for improvement in Native Americans but the racism of the Jacksonian era refused to even consider the possibility. Sedgwick, however, seems to refute this point of view with her portrayal of Magawisca as a noble, dignified and highly moral figure. Entering the courtroom on the day of her trial, Magawisca's "erect attitude, her free and lofty tread, and the perfect composure of her countenance, all expressed the courage and dignity of her soul" (Sedgwick 282).

In the end, it is Hope's freeing of Magawisca that brings an end to the conflict of the novel, and perhaps some of the future conflicts of the colony. Maria Karafilis calls Hope's philosophy her "radical democratic individualism" and asserts that "when the state fails to serve the functions and provide the protections that it was created to secure" Hope is free to act to correct these mistakes. Strand argues that:

> Sedgwick viewed justified interpositions as sympathetic, mediatory acts on behalf of the "rights of innocence" –acts that in turn challenged power hierarchies in the defense of natural rights, that touched on questions of republican citizenship, and that finally found particularly persuasive expression in the form of the petition.

As Karafilis puts it, "Hope's freeing of Magawisca…ironically secures the good of the Puritan community by preventing retaliatory attacks…." Even Governor Winthrop begins to trust Hope, saying to Mr. Fletcher, "' we may trust your wild-wood bird; her flights are somewhat devious, but her instincts are safer than I once thought them'" (Sedgwick 303). Esther's obedience harms no one, but it does not help anyone either. Her refusal to see the necessity for independent judgment and "the existence of multiple and often conflicting 'truths' or perspectives" (Karafilis) leave her powerless to help anyone.

Sedgwick contrasts the beliefs and actions (or inactions) of Hope Leslie and Esther Downing in order to illustrate the importance of self-governance and independent moral judgment. Although both women are happy with their respective fates, in the end it is Hope who refuses to completely submit her will and moral judgment to Puritan patriarchal authority, and Hope who accomplishes her goals. Esther remains frozen by her commitment to obedience. She also returns to England for most of her life (eventually she comes back to Boston), a sign that Sedgwick feels Esther's morals are more suited to the Old World than the New. In Jacksonian America women were beginning to "exercise the political voice foundational to claiming democratic citizenship" (Strand). Esther's refusal to exercise or even acknowledge her role as an individual with her own moral judgment simply does not fit within the scope of Sedgwick's America. Magawisca complicates Sedgwick's argument. Although she does petition and act on behalf of others and exercises her own judgment, she is still not able to separate from what she ultimately believes is right: staying with her tribe. Although she loves the Fletchers she explains to Everell and Hope, "the Indian and the white man can no more mingle, and become one, than day and night" (Sedgwick 330). Magawisca must return to her people and their set of laws, although part of her heart does yearn to stay with her friends.

It is clear that Sedgwick was using a historical perspective to illustrate contemporary conflicts and issues that arose with the establishment of the United States of America as an independent nation, and Jacksonian American debates over the presence of women in the public realm. Sedgwick makes a case for what Karafilis calls "radical democratic individualism" by giving Hope and Magawisca the tools and judgment to act according to their own moral compasses for the good of the community as a whole and thereby endorsing the role of the individual in political and legal decision making. "In effect, she asserts that the female conscience is as valid a source of social authority as is the legal power held by men" (Garvey). Hope and Magawisca's moral convictions, and especially their decisions to act on those convictions, are what set them apart from the other characters in the novel and give voice to the roles and responsibilities of the individual in a new and changing society. Magawisca's role as a racial other further complicates Sedgwick's argument by illustrating the undertone of racism in Puritan society to expose the same trend in Jacksonian America.

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